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ABSTRACT

The instructor of a course focusing on basic academic and job readiness skills for welfare recipients at the Goodwill Employment Help Center in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, conducted an action research project to determine whether developing personal mission statements would increase students' motivation in her course. As new students were accepted into the course, they were asked to participate in the following activities: (1) complete a questionnaire about their attitudes; (2) participate in an informal discussion about personal goals, responsibility, and determining one's likelihood of achieving goals; and (3) write a personal mission statement. Students' motivation was measured through surveys administered before and after the mission statement activity, field notes, and interviews. Of the 12 students who initially agreed to participate in the project, only 3 actually remained in the study long enough to complete mission statements. All three students stated that the mission statements helped increase their feeling of responsibility for their academic and career success. The remaining 9 students dropped out of the study for reasons unrelated to the study. (Appendixes constituting approximately 60% of this document contain the following four items: mission statement of Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh; instructor's personal mission statement; mission statement lesson outline; and student questionnaire.) (MN)

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

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Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

Students' lack of participation in class, excess absences, and the instructor's perception of a general lack of motivation at the Goodwill Employment Help Center in McKeesport cause this researcher to believe that many students need help in establishing goals for themselves. I hoped that developing a personal mission statement would help increase the motivation of my students. Motivation would be measured by using pre and post-surveys, creation of a mission statement, field notes, interviews, and questionnaires. It was hoped that this intervention would produce a 20% increase in students' motivation. Increase in motivational attitude would be determined through analysis of the above data collection methods. Due to some unexpected variables, results were not as anticipated.

II. PROBLEM

Goodwill offers a variety of learning opportunities for adults at their South Side location and other community based sites. Recognizing a need in the Mon Valley area, the McKeesport site was opened in May of 1998 to serve welfare recipients. Affected by TANF regulations, students are referred by their Department of Welfare caseworkers to Goodwill's Community Solutions Program where they are provided with opportunity

* to study for their GED
* benefit from ABE studies
* learn job readiness skills
* profit from job training in data entry and child care provider programs as well as drivers' education

These students are eligible for the Community Solutions program only if they had participated, and had not been successful, in at least one other welfare-to-work program. I question whether students are able to see themselves in the role of a successful worker, earning sufficient income to provide for their families. Lacking previous educational and work related successes, some have expressed a feeling of security with welfare dependence, and an inability to conceptualize themselves in any other role than that in which they currently are. Students have said that they feel that success lie outside their locus of control. My role as instructor is not only to facilitate their learning, but also seek ways in which to motivate and challenge, and to build self-

esteem and confidence.

It is perceived that students' potential may not be fully realized, and may frustrate educational and career development. Therefore, it was felt to be timely and appropriate to address this issue. .I feel that once an individual is able to accept responsibility for the success of reaching their learning and career goals, the more motivated they become. The more they wish to succeed; the more they do succeed. Experiencing the success of some of my students, I have seen the contagious effect on others in the class. This can only demonstrate a positive attitude among students, Goodwill, and staff.

III. PLANNING

Problem defined: the problem is "How can I help instill in my students a sense of responsibility for academic and career accomplishments that will ultimately result in more motivated and successful students?"

Every two weeks new students are accepted into the class. The number varies between one (1) and five (5) new students at each intake, with an average of two (2) new students each enrollment time. My plan was to begin on November 24, and to use students enrolling from that date until the end of the year 1998 in this research study. Each participant would be involved in the study for six (6) weeks. I anticipated that between ten (10) and fifteen (15) individuals would be recruited for this activity. Students would first be asked to participate and sign a release form if they chose to be involved in the project. Then, each individual would be asked to complete a questionnaire in which their attitudes would be assessed. Following would be an informal discussion about goals, responsibility and determining one's likelihood of achieving goals. This discussion also included an imagery session in which the participants were asked to visualize their lives being different than that which they now experience. The discussion concluded with my talking about mission statements. I explained that organizations have goals; and they spend much time and effort in developing missions statements directed toward successfully meeting those goals.

Many have written of their philosophy regarding the use of personal mission statements, including Steven Covey in his book Seven Habits of Seven Highly Effective People. Thus, this concept became the focus of my intervention. Lastly, participants were asked to develop their own

mission statement.

As a baseline for this project, attitudes of those participating in the class prior to the beginning of this project were inspected. Those students, upon entering the program, had completed The Workcare Inventory. The purpose of this inventory is to gauge students' attitudes and skills in regard to work.

Criteria for success for the intervention will be realized if students demonstrate a clearer understanding of their power in achieving their goals. They will also become more goal oriented as a result of developing their own personal mission statement; and that the mission statement will cause a 20% increase in students' acceptance of responsibility for whether or not they achieve their goals. This 20% increase will be determined through analysis of a post Workcare inventory, field notes documenting instructor perception of participants' approach to classroom participation, and attendance records. Additionally, a follow up group discussion will solicit responses that are expected to provide insight into participants' attitudes. Results will then be compared to discussion from the initial discussion that took place at the beginning of this project.

IV. ACTION

The first step in the intervention process was to ask all students to become involved in the project. All students, including those not specifically involved in the intervention, were given a letter briefly explaining the purpose of the project. Attached was a consent form, which the students signed if they wished to be included in this study. Twelve students signed consent forms; however, for various reasons (2 secured employment, 2 withdrew, 3 decided, prior to writing their mission statement, to not continue in the project), over time this group decreased to five (5) active participants.

After orientation to the program, all twelve (12) were provided with additional information about the research project. Information was given regarding the philosophy of a mission statements. Goodwill's, and the researchers personal mission statement, were examined. Students were then asked to develop their own mission statement. Following are portions of some of these statements:

* "To accomplish this goal, I'll have to attend training classes, find reliable transportation, attend classes regularly, be punctual, work hard to be responsible and find back-up

childcare."

* "I will continue to work hard, be responsible, cooperative, and stay dedicated to overcoming any obstacles that may keep me from becoming successful."
* "What I will do to reach my goals: study more, accept help with my GED studies, participate in class, do class work as required, be more serious about my goals and education."

Weekly, for five (5) weeks, participants were asked to review their mission statement, and to share thoughts about the impact that the statement was having with their approach to learning. Students involved in this study were given a different questionnaire, which asked more explicit questions.

Some said that each time they looked at their mission statement (I had asked that they keep it in the front of their daily binder), it caused them to feel more committed to adhering to what they said in the paper. They felt that it was like a promise, and they should keep their promises.

V. RESULTS

Results from a Workcare Inventory that had been given to eleven (11) program participants who were not used in this study, indicate that they experience dissatisfaction with jobs that they have held because they

* feel that they have little or no control over decisions concerning the job
* they have a feeling of insecurity about their problem solving skills
* and they lack knowledge and skills for dealing with stress

Results also indicated that they held others more accountable for their success. However, it was observed that some of the eleven (11) students who did not participate in the intervention seemed to exhibit a growth and accountability for themselves.

Situations arose that presented difficulty with administering the intervention to its completion. Because of TANF regulations, several students were required to leave the academic portion of the program prematurely in order to secure employment. Consequently, the original twelve (12) participants decreased to five (5). At the end of six (6) weeks, each of the five (5) remaining students were given a final questionnaire to complete. Two students chose not to complete the form. These two (2) students had recently learned that, because of the limited number

of TANF days left, they were required to begin an active job search. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the TANF regulations and demonstrated this by their refusal to complete this study. Of the three (3) remaining students, all felt that their mission statement had made a difference and felt that they were more responsible for their academic and career successes. Following are some responses from the three participants' (3) who did complete the form:

* "... mission paper gives me strength and courage to go on."
* "... helps me with my studies and my attitude."
* "... it made my attitude more positive."

Classroom observation and conversations of each student during the week of January 4, 1999, indicate that this group lacks a thorough understanding of goals, are unclear about what they need to do to attain their goals, and that they have a pessimistic attitude about their likelihood of attaining those goals. For example, many students, when asked what their academic goals are, will simply say that they want to "... get their GED" or "get a job". But they are unable to express the steps that they must follow in order to reach the expressed goal. When asked whose responsibility it is to see that they attain their goals, several responded that it is the instructors, or an individual other than themselves. Or, they may say that circumstances determine whether they will be successful ñ if they can work out childcare, transportation or some other barrier. They seem unable to comprehend that working toward a solution to their barrier(s) is their responsibility, and that in overcoming this barrier(s), they are addressing responsibility for their success. They see this as an extrinsic force that deters them from reaching goals.

VI. REFLECTION

Initially, I felt that the intervention would cause participants to become the responsible and motivated students that educators like to see in their classrooms. Perhaps this would have occurred had the students' life experiences been different. For example: had they not been mandated to attend a program (or find immediate employment without the skills that they needed), had they had more choices in the work skills programs offered, had they not the barriers that face so many single mothers, or if they had a more positive attitude about learning and their likelihood of success, if they had encouragement and support from family and friends - then perhaps attitudes would be different.

Participants seemed unable to comprehend the purpose of the mission statement. It appeared that, for the most part, they wrote what they thought I wanted them to write. It appears that the writing of a mission statement is not sufficient cause for them to look differently at the issue of responsibility. This is not to say that they do not desire to reach their goals; but that they still are unsure of their ability to do so and that the power to do so lie within themselves.

Reflecting on this action research, I have come to the conclusion that applying this intervention to students new to the program was not the best course of action. Perhaps students need to be involved in the program for a longer period of time, experience some achievements, and "buy" into the program before an intervention of this magnitude can be effective. Should a second phase of this action research be undertaken, the researcher should have a better understanding of the student served. Additionally, the student should be given time to become acclimated to the learning experience.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the participants, perhaps a discussion group could be formed in which students would discuss issues of concern to them. These issues might include problems with childcare, transportation, coordinating services, family issues, living arrangements and conditions, and other facets that may be interfering with their ability to take class work seriously. Personnel would work with students in assisting them in resolving their issues. Then, somewhere between two (2) and four (4) weeks into the program, program participants may be more prepared to become involved in such an activity.

The term "Mission Statement" seemed foreign to most of the participants; some had never heard the term. They appeared to have difficulty comprehending the concept. Goals seemed a clearer concept. In a follow up intervention, developing a goal achievement list ñ or some other name other than mission statement ñ might be more comprehensible to them.

Early reflection on this project caused me to feel that it was not successful. Further reflection tells me that, even though I did not receive the results I had originally anticipated, the project was, in fact, a success. Success does not always mean getting the results that we hoped for originally. This project indicates success because it shows what does not work (too early an intervention), what needs to be investigated and further understood (the participants), and suggestions for future considerations.

APPENDICES

PAGE

A. Mission Statement: 1

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh

Instructor's (personal mission statement)

B. Mission Statement lesson outline 2-3

C. Workcare Inventory 4-7

Inventory completed by students not participating in action research project and prior to implementation of project.

D. Student questionnaire 8-9

Completed by each participant involved with action research project.

E. Follow-up questionnaire 10

Completed by each participant involved with action research project.

Goodwill Mission Statement

Our Mission

Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh is a work force development agency and network of not-for-profit business whose mission is to provide job preparation and training, placement assistance, employment opportunities, and related social services and supports for people with special needs to help them enjoy the dignity and benefits of work and a better quality of life.

My Personal Mission Statement

As an instructor at McKeesport's Goodwill Employment Help Center, it is my mission to provide individual GED/ABE instruction and job preparation training. It is my objective to plan and implement instruction that will most benefit the students in their transtion into the workforce.

MISSION STATEMENT LESSON

1. **What is a mission statement?**
   It is your affirmation, philosophy and purpose rolled into one. It is your personal challenge to yourself. It is an opportunity to bring your goals into focus and transfer your ideals into the real world. It is your success plan.

2. **Who should write a mission statement?**
   Everyone

3. **What are the ground rules?**

- **Define yourself.**
  - What kind of person are you?
  - What do you do?
  - What is your character?
  - Who or what are you dedicated to?
  - Affirm that you will strive to get better, do new things, and grow.
  - Where do you aspire to be?
  - What do you want to achieve?
  - How will you achieve your goals?
- Use your goals and purpose to define your mission statement.
- Here are some words that will help you define your mission statement:
  - Will
  - Dedication
  - Persist
  - Honest
  - Ethical
  - Positive
  - Enthusiastic
  - Fun
  - Health
  - Learn new things
  - Listen
  - Help
  - Provide
  - Encourage
  - Others
  - Continually
- Describe the things you think you are and the things you seek to accomplish or become
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to flatter yourself
- Affirm everything you think you are or think you want to become

4. **THE Dos**

- Unite your essay and give it direction with a theme or thesis. The thesis is the main points your want to communicate.
- Before you begin writing, choose what you want to discuss and the order in which you want to discuss it
- Use concrete examples from your life experience to support your thesis and distinguish yourself from other applications
- Write about what interests you, excites you. That's what the admissions staff wants to read.
- Start your essay with an attention grabbing led an anecdotal quote, question or engaging description of a scene
- End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the led and restates your thesis
- Revise your essay at least three times
- \In addition to your editing asks someone else to critique your personal statement for you.
- Proofread your personal statement by reading it out loud or reading it into a tape recorder and playing back the tape
- Write clearly succinctly.

5. **The don'ts**
- Don't include information that doesn't support your thesis.
- Don't start your essay with "I was born in..."
- Don't write an autobiography, itinerary or resume
- \don't try to be a clown
- don't try to impress with vocabulary
- don't provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes
- don't make up things.

THE WORKCARE INVENTORY

The following statements are grouped in categories that represent specific work-related attitudes and skills. For each statement, circle one of the five responses that best describes your feelings.

CORE SKILLS

Personal Work Beliefs

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
• I'm satisfied with my job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I have control over the decisions concerning my job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I'm confident in my ability to do my job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I believe my failures or disappointments are only a temporary setback.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Work Attitudes

• I understand my company's business and the products and services it provides.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I understand my job responsibilities and the expectations of my supervisor.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I organize and plan my work around my major objectives.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I understand how I'm evaluated on my performance.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• My supervisor understands my career goals and supports my decisions.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Literacy

• I have no problem reading signs and labels.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I have no problem reading newspapers and magazines.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I feel comfortable about my writing skills.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I can balance my checkbook and can easily do other tasks that require me to compute numbers.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• My reading, writing and math skills meet the requirements of my job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Communication Skills

• People tell me I'm a good listener.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• My verbal skills are good.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

The WorkCare Inventory

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
• People understand what I say the first time.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I have no difficulty in presenting ideas to groups of people.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Problem-Solving

• I know how to look at a problem and identify its possible causes.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I know how to identify potential solutions to a specific problem.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I know how to develop a plan in implementing a solution.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I know how to check to see if the solution is working.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Teamwork

• I understand the goals and objectives of the work team.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I function well in group and team settings.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I contribute to the goals of my work team.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• People tell me I'm a team player.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Personal Quality

• When doing my job, I do it right the first time, even if it means a delay.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I understand the key concepts concerning total quality management.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I know how to use the quality tools that have been implemented in my company.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

Self-Care On The Job

• I consider myself to be in good physical health.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I try to include some form of physical activity during my workday.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I eat healthy foods on and off the job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10
• I know how to reduce stress and tension on the job.	-10	-5	0	+5	+10

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The WorkCare Inventory

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
• I know the safety policies of my company.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• When working, I don't take unnecessary risks that may endanger myself or my co-workers.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I practice appropriate safety measures when traveling.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I use alcohol responsibly and don't use illicit drugs.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• When operating a motor vehicle, I use my seat belt.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I take precautions in protecting myself from job-related injuries such as lower back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10

Personal Effectiveness/Planning

• I can identify the cause(s) of my stress and effectively deal with it.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I'm able to effectively balance the challenges of my work and my personal life.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I'm aware of all the services that may be available through my company that can assist me with such problems as work/family conflicts, alcohol and drug dependence, child care, elder care and work-related conflicts.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I'm aware of what resources are available in my community to assist me with personal problems.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• In my personal planning, I take into consideration my retirement needs.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I live within my financial means, without experiencing excessive debt or hardship.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I have an emergency savings account equal to six months of my living expenses.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10

Other Work Issues

• I understand my company's benefit and compensation plans.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10

The WorkCare Inventory

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
• I understand my company's health benefit plan.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I understand my responsibilities and the limitations of my health benefit program (deductibles, coinsurance, copayments) before I use the plan.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• If offered, I understand my company's pension and savings plans.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I'm aware of my rights concerning such issues as mental, physical and sexual harassment and discrimination based on age, sex, race or disability.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I'm aware of alternative work schedules that my company may sponsor, such as flex time.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10
• I try to be environmentally aware within my place of work.	–10	–5	0	+5	+10

What Do My Results Mean?

This simple quiz is designed to graphically show the strengths and weaknesses of your WorkCare skills. In each category, see where your responses are concentrated. If your scores concentrate in the two left columns (negative scores), this suggest that your WorkCare skills may need significant work. Scores in the middle of the scale suggest that your attitudes and skills are average, but still need careful examination. If your responses concentrate to the right, congratulations! This suggests that you've achieved a good balance in your work and life.

Where Do I Go From Here?

In looking at your results, you may have found that you need to improve certain WorkCare skills and attitudes. The following chart will help you locate specific topics within this book that can help you. We encourage you to read these sections and to try out some of the ideas they present. You may also want to get additional information from the "Resources" identified under each topic.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. When I am given instructions, I sometimes don't follow them exactly. This is because:
   a. The person giving instructions didn't make him/herself clear.
   b. I felt there was a better way to do it.
   c. I forgot or as unclear about what I was to do and didn't ask questions.
   d. I didn't feel like doing it.
2. If I have made a mistake, I will
   a. not tell anyone unless I have to
   b. admit that I made the mistake and do what I can to fix it
   c. act like I don't know who made the mistake
   d. blame someone else
3. If I don't understand something, I
   a. try to figure it out myself
   b. ask questions so that I do understand
   c. act as if I do understand
4. My success depends on
   a. others doing what they are supposed to do
   b. myself
   c. not sure
5. I will do whatever it takes to meet my goals.
   YES _____ NO ____
   If no, why not? _____
   _____

6. ☐ a. People often succeed because they are in the right place at the right time.
   ☐ b. Success is mostly dependent on hard work and ability.
7. ☐ a. When things go wrong in my life, it is generally because I have made mistakes.
   ☐ b. Misfortunes occur in my life regardless of what I do.
8. ☐ a. Good children are mainly products of good parents.
   ☐ b. Some children turn out bad no matter how their parents behave.
9. ☐ a. When I think back on the good things that happened to me, I believe they happened mainly because of something I did.
   ☐ b. The bad things that have happened in my life have mainly resulted from circumstances outside my control.
10. ☐ a. To avoid punishing children guarantees that they will grow up irresponsible.
    ☐ b. Spanking children is never appropriate.
11. ☐ a. I often feel that I have little influence over the direction my life is taking.
    ☐ b. It is unreasonable to believe that fate or luck plays a crucial part in how my life turns out.

12. ☐ a. Some customers will never be satisfied no matter what you do.
    ☐ b. You can satisfy customers by giving them what they want when they want it.
13. ☐ a. Anyone can get good grades in school if he or she works hard enough.
    ☐ b. Some people are never going to excel in school no matter how hard they try.

14. ☐ a. People seek responsibility in work.
    ☐ b. People try to get away with doing as little as they can.
15. ☐ a. The most popular people seem to have a special, inherent charisma that attracts people to them.
    ☐ b. People become popular because of how they behave.
16. ☐ a. Things over which I have little control just seem to occur in my life.
    ☐ b. Most of the time I feel responsible for the outcomes I produce.
17. ☐ a. I am persuasive when I know I'm right.
    ☐ b. I can persuade most people even when I'm not sure I'm right.
18. ☐ a. I tend to plan ahead and generate steps to accomplish the goals that I have set.
    ☐ b. I seldom plan ahead because things generally turn out OK anyway.
19. ☐ a. Some things are just meant to be.
    ☐ b. We can change anything in our lives by hard work, persistence, and ability.